

HIGHWAYS OF STATEWIDE SIGNIFICANCE (HSS) UPDATE

BRIEFING PAPER

Prepared for the
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PURPOSE:

Report on results of analysis of Highways of Statewide Significance (HSS), including proposed changes as nominated by Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs), and make recommendations for update to the HSS System.

BACKGROUND:

In August 2003, the Commission directed WSDOT to implement a planning process to update the HSS system in accordance with the Legislative requirement that the Commission review the system at least every five years.

The update process asked RTPOs to nominate routes for addition to or deletion from the HSS list. The following criteria are the basis for HSS designation:

This statewide system shall include at a minimum interstate highways and other statewide principal arterials that are needed to connect major communities across the state and support the state's economy. (RCW 47.05.021(3)) (*emphasis added*)

[and]

The legislature declares the following transportation facilities and services to be of statewide significance: The interstate highway system, interregional state principal arterials including ferry connections that serve statewide travel....(RCW 47.06.140) (*emphasis added*)

Any proposed changes recommended by the Transportation Commission must be sent to the Legislature by January 2004.

Legislative Transportation Committee (LTC)

The Legislative Transportation Committee (LTC) established a working group that discussed the definition, application, and impact of HSS designation. Members are:

Sen. Haugen
Sen. Kastama
Sen. Horn
Sen. Swecker

Rep. Jarrett
Rep. Armstrong
Rep. Hatfield
Rep. Sullivan

The HSS working group held its first meeting on September 17, 2003. They concurred with the Commission's update approach, but asked legislative staff to formulate refinements to the existing criteria to further interpret the criteria found in RCW 47.05.021(3) and RCW 47.06.140.

RTPO Process Concerns

The constrained time frame for the HSS update caused concern for WSDOT, Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs), Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), and local jurisdictions. The schedule originally showed a two-month (September - October) period for local coordination but late input from the LTC delayed this process. As a result, the Commission extended the deadline for RTPO/MPO nominations until Dec. 1, 2003. RTPOs /MPOs were provided with a listing of the refinements developed by the LTC workgroup in a memo dated Oct. 6, 2003.

DISCUSSION:

WSDOT staff completed analysis of the existing HSS system as well as nominated changes to the system. The results of that analysis are described in the following two sections.

Analysis of the Existing System

The existing HSS system represents 50% of all centerline miles of state highways. The authorizing Legislation provides the following direction:

This statewide system shall include at a minimum interstate highways and other statewide principal arterials that are needed to connect major communities across the state and support the state's economy. (RCW 47.05.021(3)) (*emphasis added*)

The legislature declares the following transportation facilities and services to be of statewide significance: The interstate highway system, interregional state principal arterials including ferry connections that serve statewide travel. (RCW 47.06.140) (*emphasis added*)

WSDOT staff reviewed the existing HSS system against the direction provided in the law. This review also took into account factors raised by the LTC Working Group related to freight routes and other systems; traffic volumes; and access to airports, marine ports, county seats, and major recreational attractions. The results of this analysis are described below:

Interstate Highways And Principal Arterials:

The law requires that the system be focused on Interstate Highways and those functionally classified as Principal Arterials. The current HSS system includes all interstate highways. The rest of the HSS routes are functionally classified as principal arterials, with two exceptions (see attachment A). SR 20 is classified as a minor arterial, but this route provides a cross-state connection across the northern tier counties. Also, a small section of US 97 between Union Gap and Toppenish is a minor arterial because the major traffic movement uses I-82 in that segment. This section was included as an HSS to provide continuity in a route that reaches from the Canadian border to the Oregon border.

Connects Major Communities:

During the original designation, the HSS system was designed to connect all metropolitan areas in the state, as designated by the US Census Bureau. The system does connect all of these areas, including the three new metropolitan areas designated by the 2000 census (Mt. Vernon, Wenatchee, and Lewiston/Clarkston)(see attachment A).

In addition to connecting urbanized areas, the LTC workgroup requested that WSDOT look at whether the system connects all county seats. Our analysis indicates that all but two county seats (Ephrata, and Asotin) are directly served by the HSS system, and the HSS system does serve the major population centers in those two counties.

Support the State's Economy:

The HSS system supports the state's economy by providing cross-state connections for commerce, tourism, and freight movement. The HSS system contains most but not all of the Strategic Freight Highway & Roadway Corridors. All interstates and the majority of US route mileage are found in both the HSS System and Strategic Freight Corridors (see attachment D).

In addition to freight routes, the LTC workgroup asked WSDOT to analyze how the system served airports and marine ports and major recreational attractions. As for airports and marine ports, the HSS provides good connections to the general vicinities of both the state's commercial airports and the major marine ports. However, the actual roadways that directly connect these airports and marine ports to the HSS system are most often local roadways. Attachment B is a map that shows the location of commercial airports and major ports in relation to the HSS system.

As for major recreational attractions, WSDOT staff developed a list of these ranked by annual visitors (see attachment C). The existing HSS system does serve many of these, but does not serve others. Staff has concluded that serving these recreational attractions should not be a major factor in HSS designation. Many recreational activities are not compatible with attributes of HSS designation such as high traffic volumes and freight traffic.

Serves Statewide Travel:

WSDOT does not have origin/destination survey data that might be helpful in determining if a route serves a large number of intercity trips. In the absence of specific data on intercity travel, WSDOT looked both at whether the routes "made sense" as cross-state connections, and WSDOT analyzed traffic volume information which is readily available.

The HSS system does include those routes that most people can agree are part of a logical cross-state system. These include all of the Interstate routes (I-5, I-405, I-90, I-82, I-205, I-705, and I-182), as well as the long-distance principal arterials, including SR 20, US 2, US 12, SR 26, SR 4, SR 14, US 101, SR 3, US 97, and US 395. Other routes are either extensions and connections through urban areas, or are important links between these highways in rural areas.

WSDOT staff also analyzed traffic volume data to determine patterns, and to see if the HSS system captured the higher volume routes. For this analysis, traffic volume data for the state highway system was divided into four groups: the 3 Puget Sound counties

(King, Pierce and Snohomish), urban and rural; and the 36 other counties, urban and rural. These groupings were made to distinguish between the much higher volumes in the Puget Sound compared to the rest of the state and to account for urban and rural differences in volumes. These four groupings were then arrayed by average daily traffic volume, using 2001 traffic counts. This analysis indicates that, in general, the HSS system has included the highest volume routes within the state and that, in general, low volume routes are not included on the HSS. Some exceptions to this are some urban arterials that have high volumes, but are not designated as HSS (such as SR 520, SR 500, SR 522, SR 99, and SR 509) and some rural routes that have very low volumes, but are included on the HSS (such as SR 20, US 2, US 395, and SR 127). For these exceptions, the route's function as a logical statewide connector is more important than the specific volume using the route.

Conclusion:

Reviewed against the statutory criteria, the present HSS system largely meets legislative intent. There are no route segments that should be deleted from the system based on this review. The volume review, however, may support some of the nominations received by the Commission for additions to the system.

RECOMMENDATION:

Existing System

Based upon discussion with the regions, analysis of the existing system and review of factors considered in establishing the current system, WSDOT does not recommend deletion of any routes from the existing system.

Proposed Additions

Due to the Dec. 1, 2003, deadline for nominations for changes to the HSS system, the analysis and recommendation for nominations will be supplied at the Commission meeting. It is expected that nominating entities will be present at the Transportation Commission meeting to provide additional information and answer questions.

For further information, contact Elizabeth Robbins, Policy Development & Regional Coordination Manager, at (360) 705-7371.